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HB- 6930 - AN ACT CONCERNING REGIONAL COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Connecticut's small towns and cities support initiatives to encourage voluntary regional cooperation to provide programs and services to meet the needs of local residents in a more efficient, cost-effective manner. As Connecticut's small towns and cities struggle to do more with less, many communities are exploring new opportunities to share resources to meet these growing needs.

Programs such as the Regional Performance Incentive Program and the Intertown Capital Equipment Sharing program have been successful in encouraging communities to utilize regional approaches to delivering services to reduce costs. However, in some cases, towns have encountered barriers to regionalizing certain services as a result of existing statutory requirements or contractual agreements.

For example, some towns have begun exploring options to consolidate public safety dispatch services. In one case, a complaint was filed against the towns alleging that the contract to regionalize the services was prohibited by the Municipal Employee Relations Act. Although the complaint was dismissed by the Connecticut State Board of Labor Relations it certainly raised a lot of questions about how towns can move forward with regionalizing services given the various statutory constraints.

Other towns interested in regionalizing dispatch services are wary that any savings can be achieved because of the differences in wages and benefits negotiated by individual bargaining units. In some cases, consolidation has not realized any cost savings, in part, because personnel expect to be paid at least the same as personnel in the town with the highest negotiated wage and benefit levels, if not more, due to expanded service areas.

Authorizing towns to collectively bargain on a regional basis may therefore be necessary in order to achieve the "economies of scale" touted as a benefit of regionalization. We do have to be careful, however, in assuming that consolidating or otherwise regionalizing services will achieve cost savings. As Steven Lanza, an economist for the UConn Quarterly noted, "Municipal consolidation or other service-sharing plans offer no silver bullet for the problem of costly local public services."

COST urges lawmakers to explore the option of regional collective bargaining to determine whether it would assist towns in achieving cost efficiencies while maintaining the ability of towns to deliver quality services.